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A LETTER

TO THE

TRUSTEES OF COLUMBIA COLLEGE,

FROM

A CITIZEN.

NEW YORK:
THOMAS N. STANFORD, 637 BROADWAY.

M.DCCC.LVI.



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TO THE TRUSTEES OF COLUMBIA COLLEGE.

GENTLEMEN :

The atmosphere of a mercantile city is not propitious to the cause of education. Its seductive pleasures corrupt the healthful mind, and enervating pursuits substitute manly sports in the open air. But more fatal are the influences of examples which divert the attention from higher objects to easy gratifications, and instil the sad error into young hearts, that to make money is more worthy of ambition, than to be

“ ——— a man of worth,
A man of manners and of letters too.”

To combine physical and moral, with mental culture, is sought after by the great schools of England, and the success of our own military academy, furnishes an argument we are proud to offer.

But that deferential regard, which a Faculty ought to acquire, can hardly be conceded in the marts of trade, nor can it be supposed that professors, in their social relations, could enjoy exemption from that waste of time to which they are exposed. Nor is it reasonable to hope, whatever may be the provision by charter

or statutes, that the devotion which their occupation demands, will not be desecrated by secular pursuits.

The teacher and the student of a literary institution, must feel that they are in a false position, if not degraded at the court of the Money King. But, far enough removed to escape the familiarity of contact, they would all be respected and cherished. A seat of learning belonging to this city, yet set apart from its turmoil of business, and pleasure, would be an object of pride and protection for its merchant princes. From you, who have studied your present local position, and are about to repeat your experience, I trust that the project I am about to offer, although it may be thought speculative, will be considered with indulgence; for if problematical, it is yet to be condemned by experiment.

Your affairs, gentlemen, are at a crisis, and it may be that there is more danger of losing an opportunity, than in a bold effort to turn occurrences to advantage. In a circuit of thirty miles around New York, there are few locations on the map, exempt from objection; but that difficulty facilitates a choice. There is one section of country, in the county of Westchester, which seems to offer every inducement to make it the favored one. It is a fine rolling country with broad southern declivities. It has a granitic subsoil, pure water, and a wholesome climate. There are advantages of access, enjoyed perhaps, by no other part of the Union to the same extent at present, or for the future. Railroads from north, east, and west, pour a flood of travel through an isthmus, between the Hudson and the Sound, and re-

turning from the city they diverge with the expansion of the county lines, until the whole surface will be riddled with accommodations. Add to this, that steamboats are seen from every height, penetrating the harbours of the county, and furnishing easy, safe and beautiful approaches to the city.

In regard to abundance and variety of provisions, it can have no compeer from land or sea, from production or supply there must always be plenty, and even luxury.

Now, then, let me propose to you to procure one thousand acres of land in Westchester County, which shall have been judiciously selected, for the seat of a University. Such lands may be purchased at one hundred and fifty dollars per acre, yet at greater cost in approaching the city.

But it is in your power to enhance their value wherever chosen, at an equal pace with the cost of improvement, and the University can be established with the requisite accommodations, without ever having invaded her sources of income. This peculiar ability to create property, is of great consequence, and should be considered. Through you, Gentlemen, I now address myself, to the judgment of men every where about you, who have studied the improvement of real estate, and I expect from them, as experts, a confirmation of my views.

If one hundred acres of this land were appropriated for the Lyceum, Halls, Colleges, commons, and campus, &c., it may be estimated, that the remaining nine hun-

dred acres would attain a marketable value equal to the cost of the buildings, more or less as required. It would be from possession and improvement of adjacent lands, that this value could be realized by the trustees; but if in other hands, their occupation might be still convenient to the University,—but for her, the profit would be lost. On the other hand, were it as it might be a question of lands within the precincts of a city, whether the adjacent lots were occupied by colleges, or private buildings, it would matter little, they would only rise in value to the common level of demand.

Your property south of the Central Park, on which you propose to rebuild, will be in seven years as valuable for private residences, as any other in New York, and the use therefore of a part for the college, would deduct that much from your own valuable resources, and would add by any expenditure of your money, nothing to the value of the rest, which it would not as well acquire by other means. Our tide of population, doubled always in fifteen years, will have overflowed, and occupied the bounds of the old Botanic Garden in half that time.

But let us return to Westchester, and assume that the nine hundred acres of land surrounding the University and its campus, lately in pasture fields, now dedicated by your act to the uses of capital and population. Let us suppose it mapped out into lots, and streets, after the plan adopted for this island, accommodated only to the probable differences of tastes, habits and customs; there would then be 10,800 city lots, of such

dimensions as we use in New York, to be disposed of, by sale, or lease. Your action has created the demand, and you have secured for a possession the circuit of its influence, which must have a great and continued accretion of value. I may venture to say that two hundred and fifty dollars would be found, on inquiry, to be the average value of lots in any thrifty village of the county; and counting twelve lots and the adjacent street, for each acre, you would arrive upon this estimate at the enormous result of \$2,700,000.*

But if it should be reasonably objected that a population, capable of occupying so many lots, is not to be expected, I reply that the number of lots is only an approximate measure of population; that such an apportionment of ground is a matter of convenience. It will enable purchasers, or tenants to narrow or enlarge their boundaries at their pleasure. If each should occupy four lots, or one hundred feet square on an average, and at the end of seven years, one third of the premises should have been sold or leased, there must then be estimated a population of 4,500, or 900 proprietors, and the proceeds of sales would be \$900,000.

After having witnessed the rapidity with which lots have been sold, and population has accumulated in suburban villages, which are springing up in all directions about New York, and when we contemplate the attraction, that such an enterprise must afford, I think we arrive at no conclusion which can be pronounced extravagant, by any one whose experience or

* See letter appended.

observation enables him to be a good judge in such a case. It is true there can be no mathematical certainty in results from this kind of reasoning, but any fair and sound mind may balance probabilities, and form a satisfactory opinion as to the feasibility of such an enterprise.

It is not necessary here to take into account the building fund, which may be provided by sales, if it should be thought expedient, or it may be derived from the source which has been appropriated for that purpose, in any other event. But should it be deemed advisable, this whole tract of land might be put under liberal leases, renewable in terms of seven years, for ever, and thus invest the capital, facilitate the occupation, and secure a revenue from your own domain. Permit me to exemplify these views, by a statement of the problematical result, upon the expiration of seven years, viz:—

Cost of 1000 acres of land at \$150 per acre,	\$ 150,000
Interest on same at 6 per cent, ...	9,000
Survey, Grading streets, &c.	10,000
Aggregate cost of buildings erected from time to time, during term, at need, ...	700,000
Interest estimated on one half this sum, as it may accrue from use \$ 42,000, ...	21,000
Balance for credit side account, ...	41,500
	\$ 931,500
By sales of 300 acres, or 3,600 lots, at \$ 250 each, in parcels to suit demand, ...	\$ 900,000
Estimate of average interest, or rent, at 5 per cent, $\frac{1}{2}$ \$45,000, ...	22,500
Estimate of rent of chambers, for 500 students at \$ 3 per month, \$ 18,000, $\frac{1}{2}$	9,000
	\$ 931,500

Estimate of property on hand at the end of seven years, viz:—

600 acres, or 7,200 lots, unsold at \$ 250 each,	\$1,800,000
Buildings at cost as assumed requisite during term, ...	700,000
Ground and site of University, say 100 acres, or 1,200 lots at \$ 250.	300,000
	\$ 2,800,000

5 acres of Botanic Garden left available by re- moval to Westchester, say 60 lots at \$ 6,000 each, value in seven years, ...	\$ 360,000
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The basis of this estimate would be the assumed average value of lots, certainly too low, if the project is otherwise feasible, and not too high if it should only be attempted. With ample means, you would obtain as strong a faculty as that of Cambridge or of Yale, and why not under otherwise more favorable auspices, as many students as either, less on an average than that of the English or German Universities.

But to what a variety of circumstances may we look to people the precincts of such an Oxford? and with what an aptitude does the project present itself to the wants of our country? Parents devoted to the education of their children, people with moderate means who seek retirement and economy, men of letters who court congenial life, professional men, pleased with philosophic ease for the evening of their days, the merchant, escaping betimes from the anxieties of trade, the planter, from solitude or distasteful toil, and citizens, north and south, who seek a summer residence, dread-

ing the care of a farm, or the ennui of a village,—those who with simple and social taste shun the crowd at Saratoga, and the fashion at Newport, with shopkeepers, and mechanics, and all who congregate to supply the daily wants of life,—all would delight in this “*Rus in Urbe*,” these academic shades, “*nec tumultus nec solitudo*.” But it is competent, under our government, to make the domain of the University the limit of a Township, in which the magistrates, more carefully elected, and better compensated, might furnish a pattern example of that primary department, the town,—in which the laws, as adequate to all purposes of order, if duly administered, bring justice and judgment to every man’s door, might fitly relieve the University of the obloquy that follows all police duty, and, without impairing the authority of the faculty, leave the deference and dignity which belongs to their office unoffended by details.

Laws against breach of the Sabbath, profanity, vagrancy, riot, nuisance, &c., elsewhere often neglected, might be enforced; and where the faculty in other colleges are impotent, witnesses may be called by subpoena, and examined under oath, and the offender condemned and punished by *civil authority*.—As a student, he stands then before his order, faithless to his promise to observe its rules, and to conduct himself as a good citizen. Tarnished as a gentleman by the recorded sentence of a penal court, the faculty are constrained in sorrow to rebuke, dismiss, or expel the delinquent. Only in a country where the people make their own

laws, could the police of a University be maintained with effect, and yet incur neither dissatisfaction nor resistance to its authority.

The culture of mind has nowhere such freedom from political and religious restraint, and in no other country is it so divested of the shackles of ancient usages, and of social distinctions. A University, capable of attracting and combining the learned men of our own and of foreign countries, is the greatest want of the United States, and such an institution has been a favorite object of some of our best and greatest men. But the constitutional powers of the General Government have not reached it, and the States, under a generous impulse of popular opinion, have exceeded perhaps the limit of organic law, in the extent of common school education, and with such success, that the chartered favorites of colonial times, are limping behind the foremost of these modern institutions.

The prospective wealth of Columbia College is a nucleus in the hands of a prosperous community, and they are ready, with a just and generous impulse, to roll it up to the measure of their pride and patriotism. The charters of this institution make it in no way sectarian, but proclaim and reiterate, that it is in every sense Catholic. It first courted golden opinion on all sides, for its unbounded liberality; in an age not teeming with such qualities. It united in its government "the functionaries of the Province, the Mayor of the City, the Rector of Trinity Church, the senior minister of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, the minister of the

Ancient Lutheran Church, the minister of the French Church, and the minister of the Presbyterian congregation," and provides that "no person shall be excluded from the college on account of his particular tenets in matters of religion." But not content with this protection of learning against sectarian jealousy, our legislature afterwards provided, "that no persons shall be trustees in virtue of any offices, characters or descriptions whatsoever," and thus, by an act worthy of the republic, ignored all differences, by destroying all distinction.

The College was to be essentially Protestant, but this feature required a security in the appointment of its President, which was happily effected by the condition of an endowment from Trinity Church.

Here none quarrel with the motive who feel the benefit of its effects; each might have had a preference, but who is prepared to say, that it would have come to a different result, if the choice had been left to a general election by all denominations.

"Let there be light" is the high behest to which all bow with common devotion. Let research be free and thought unbounded; still sound learning and true science are bulwarks of the Church Catholic, and your close corporation will act safely within its fiduciary trust, when it shall countenance no pragmatism or jealousy. Is it not considerate of its purposes to go beyond the sound of Bow-Bells, move out of the shadow of Trinity Church, escape the cramp of a local prejudice, and in the spirit of your organic law, to assume your true position, at the head of the Protestant cause? If the in-

stitution is relieved of all hurtful connection with the City, so, too, its influence with the inhabitants must increase, and ties that bind educated men to an "Alma Mater" will be multiplied fondly and freely, upon all sides, until they render her more appropriately its own. For the numerous objections, which limit the number of candidates for admission, and which have grown stronger, with a proportional increase of population, as now too clearly manifested by a disproportion of students, will then be removed. A University frequented by a majority of New York students, would emphatically belong to the city, for it would be its matriculations that would constitute its character, which in nowise could be impaired by its location.

Again, connected perhaps with an academy of art, not incompatible with the general object,—the sense of beauty with the love of truth,—a capacious Atheæum might be erected on some part of the old Botanic Garden, where, in fit courses of popular lectures, the Professors of the University might identify it with the interests of the City. The reputation which has given them their position must attract large audiences, indulgent, and confident of their ability to teach, while their emolument and fame, will be as advantageous to the University as grateful to themselves.

Happy in the means of an intellectual amusement, which has become a custom of the times, honored at home and abroad by great ability, our citizens will regard the University in its influence upon their taste and manners as a benefaction, and it will indeed be so

when it shall make them consent to be proud of it, when it shall be known and identified with New York, as it has never been known and identified before.

If a national Institution had been chartered by Congress, its safety and usefulness would have been placed at the hazard of political opinion, but it may be your mission to strengthen the foundations of the Republic, while you stand aloof from the errors of party politics.

An essential part of the education of a gentleman, is to be well grounded in the history, and fundamental law of his own country; and nothing can contribute more to the individual and common welfare, than sound elementary knowledge in this department. The geographical, political, and commercial position of New York, should give an importance to her teachings of that knowledge, which must advance her influence, while it acts with magnetic power on the Union. Perhaps, next to that of the Chief Justice, no place will be more coveted, none more influential, and none better filled, than that of Professor of Constitutional Law in this University. He who forms the future statesmen of this country, should be a man to rank with Marshall and Story,—the Federalists;—and the great trio—the Pointers—and the Polar star of Constitutional Law.

Probably the idea of a University for this country could only be developed, in time, by the faculty who are to control it; but I entertain the common notion, that it is an institution in which the foundations of

universal knowledge may be laid, with the classics and mathematics as the chief corner-stones.

I suppose if such a project were entertained by your wealthy corporation, in the neighborhood, and under the patronage of this City, that many a man of parts and acquirement in our wide country, who finds his field narrow and his views large, will feel a glow of generous ambition when the rumor reaches him

I suppose, that wherever man has prospered and his fortune flowered, whether here in our streets, or on the banks of the Mississippi, its first fruits would be gladly offered for such an education of his son, as would crown the labors of his own life, and rescue him from the vices and inanity of wealth; but its best fruits would be to raise an Aristocracy, which would stand and shine, the strength and the ornament of the state—whose knowledge will be its power,—whose beauty will be its virtue,—its fraternal bond,—“*idem sentire de Republica.*”

I am so humble a man, that my name would give no force to my words, and I prefer to use the freedom of speech which would not offend, yet accords less with the respectful tone of a quiet gentleman, than with that of

AN EARNEST CITIZEN.

DEAR SIR,

In answering your inquiries in reference to the value of village lots in the southerly part of the county of Westchester, and my ability to give information on that subject, I would say, that I have had some opportunities of judging of the value of real estate in Westchester county, having resided there and practised surveying for more than twenty years. The following statement will give you a pretty correct idea of the present value of vacant lots within the settled part of the villages enumerated :

Mott Haven, from \$150 to \$400 per city lot 25×100.					
Morrisania, “	100	“	500	“	“
Fordham, “	125	“	300	“	“
West Farms, “	100	“	500	“	“
Westchester, “	100	“	300	“	“
Eastchester, “	50	“	250	“	“
Yonkers, “	200	“	1000	“	“
Tarrytown, “	100	“	500	“	“
Whiteplains, “	100	“	400	“	“
New Rochelle, “	100	“	400	“	“

In the old villages, the lots on the main streets bring more money than those in the new villages. The value of lots in the villages of Westchester, Eastchester, West Farms, and Whiteplains, have been more uniform than in any of the other villages enumerated. You are at liberty to make any use of this statement you may deem proper.

Yours truly,

ANDREW FINDLAY.

WEST MORRISANIA, *April 2d*, 1856.

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